

ARTICLE VII.

THE UNITAS FRATRUM.

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No other Christian nation has had the religious experience of Bohemia. During her fifteen centuries on the stage of history she has changed her religion five times. Her first venture was the abandonment of Slavic paganism for Greek Christianity in 863. In the course of the tenth century she embraced Romanism, from which, over a century before Luther, she revolted during the Hussite reformation. For two centuries subsequent she remained the first of the Protestant nations, only to succumb to the Catholic counter-reformation during the Thirty Years' War, since which time Bohemia has again been almost exclusively Roman Catholic. A nation with such varied experience will have something of value to teach the religious world. Bohemia's pregnant history and tragic end entitle her to speak an authoritative word of warning and encouragement to her more favored sisters in the galaxy of Protestant nations. Moreover, it is a mistake to think that interest in Bohemia is confined to her religious history, and ceases with her decline after the Thirty Years' War. The nineteenth century witnessed her national resurrection, an event unparalleled in the annals of the race, and calling forth the wonder and admiration of no less a mind than Goethe's. Ignorance alone is responsible for the neglect of this rich historic lore on the part of English writers. Wherefore it is our purpose to shed a ray of light on this neglected subject by

giving a sketch of the best achievement of Bohemia in the religious field, the organization known as the *Unitas Fratrum*.

The rise, development, and decline of this church¹ present a unique phenomenon in history. It is generally conceded by Protestant writers that since the days of the Apostles no other church has so fully realized in practical life the ethical teachings of Christ, and that none other has shown a more earnest missionary spirit. Its type of piety, manifesting both a wholesome seriousness and a sane realism, its quiet but effective aggressiveness, its unflinching heroism during a century and a half of ceaseless persecution, its persistence and revival after apparent extermination, are facts which impress even the cursory student of its history. What were the causes that contributed to determine the unique character and career of the *Unitas Fratrum* among the Protestant churches? The answer lies partly in the circumstances that gave it birth, and partly in the peculiar temper and organization of this church.

As to the first, it is necessary to remove the common misconception that the *Unitas Fratrum* had its origin in the Taborite, or radical party of the Hussite church. Though the Brethren, especially in their later development, had doctrinally much in common with the Taborites, yet they differed from them completely in their spirit and methods. The Taborites were fighters, bent upon defending the freedom of the gospel with the sword: the Brethren were men of peace, aiming to disseminate the Truth by spiritual means only. The origin of the Brethren must rather be

¹The *Unitas Fratrum* has also been known as the Church of the Bohemian Brethren, or the Moravian Church. The distinction between Bohemia and Moravia is purely geographical. Both countries form integral parts of the Bohemian crown, and are racially and linguistically one. The classic translation of the Bohemian Bible (Bible Kralická) was printed in Moravia.

sought in the numerous small circles of earnest Christians, that, after the Hussite wars, were found grouped about Utraquist, or Calyxtine, priests, whose exceptional piety and preaching talents attracted the more spiritually-minded souls of their times. For the original Hussite movement had failed of its purpose—namely, the spiritual reformation of the religious life. Realizing this, many Utraquists began grouping themselves about their more faithful pastors who had not been swept along with the tide of reaction following the protracted and exhausting wars, and nurtured by the compromise with the Roman Church. Conspicuous among these was John Rokycana, the Utraquist archbishop, who, whatever his motives, kept up the fight against Roman abuse and corruption, preserving thus in his hearers aspirations after a holy life. He emphasized the need of a return to the Scriptures as the only source of moral reform. In this regard he declared the church helpless because of the corruption of the clergy, which, he declared, was in turn the prolific source of the corruption of the laity. Rokycana's scathing denunciations of the church so wrought up the consciences of his hearers that in alarm for their souls' safety they at length besought him to abandon the church to its fate, and, placing himself at their head, to form a new society whose sole object was to be the seeking of personal salvation. In his embarrassment the archbishop counseled his followers to join the disciples of Peter Chelcicky, a small but influential band of radicals who regarded a holy life of infinitely more value than outward ceremonies or even the sacraments, and who had therefore repudiated every form of priesthood. The writings of Peter Chelcicky thus became the organizing principle of the *Unitas Fratrum*.¹ This

¹ Annenkov has recently issued a Russian translation of Chelcicky's most important theological work, *The Net of Faith*, from which Tolstol has drawn much of his doctrine of non-resistance to evil.

bold theologian stood above all parties, criticizing freely both Hussite and Romanist, and rejecting everything that in his judgment was inconsistent in their doctrines with the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures, especially in those of the New Testament. The Taborites he upbraided for their use of the sword in defense of Christian truth. Chelcicky denounced all war as unchristian, dubbing the Taborites murderers. Even Hus and his forerunners in reform, Janov, Milic, Waldhauser, he accused of being drunk with the wine of the great harlot, the Papal Church, and poisoned with the doctrines of the purgatory, false sacraments, and a host of other abuses. Chelcicky rejected transubstantiation, affirming merely the spiritual presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. In case of the moral unfitness of the priest, a layman may administer the sacrament. The Christian community, or the local church, has oversight over the life of its members, and to it belongs the right of electing its spiritual teachers. Good works are necessary to salvation, but must be performed freely, out of love and gratitude to God, and can impose upon him no obligation for our salvation.

Such was the doctrinal basis recommended to Rokycana's admirers for their guidance to spiritual salvation. Among the first to acquaint himself with the writings of Chelcicky was a poor young nobleman, afterwards known as Brother Gregory, who became the true founder and organizer of the *Unitas Fratrum*. At his suggestion the vacillating Rokycana obtained leave from King George Podiebrad for all who so desired to settle upon the latter's estate of Litice in eastern Bohemia. Thither, about the year 1450, Brother Gregory led his colony, consisting of the hearers of Rokycana, and settled with them in the village of Kunwald. They soon were joined by Michael, an Utraquist priest of the neighboring village of

Zamberk, and later by a number of other Hussite brotherhoods. Prominent among the latter were the Chelcic brethren, and the Moravian brethren, followers of one Stephen of Kremšier. A second community was organized by another disciple of Rokycana, the Utraquist priest Martin, who settled with his colonists in the village of Krcin. The two pastors, Michael and Martin, were the religious teachers of the colonists, but Brother Gregory remained the true leader and apostle of the new movement. This remarkable man traversed Bohemia from end to end, gaining new adherents, organizing new congregations, and laying thus the foundations for a rapid development of the new church. Rokycana had emphasized the indispensableness of a moral transformation to a genuine Christian life, and had insisted on maintaining strict discipline within the church. A pure life was therefore the first prerequisite to membership in the new body. Doctrinal questions and differences naturally fell into the background. Hence from the very start the Brethren were saved from succumbing to the endemic disease of the Bohemian people of the fifteenth century, namely, religious disputations. They did not feel the need of formulating a definite confession of faith, and so did not allow themselves to be entangled in the meshes of unprofitable theological speculations. And thus it happened that the Bohemian Brethren had a thorough organization, and maintained the strictest moral discipline in their church, long before they formulated their doctrinal beliefs. This avoidance of doctrinal disputes, and emphasis upon pure life and sincere faith as against symbol and ceremony, was a characteristic trait of all those small brotherhoods out of whose fusion arose the *Unitas Fratrum*. They had left their communions because they were weary of the old disputes and desired fellowship with spirits akin to their own, for whom religion

meant the realization of a holy life. Repudiating all ascetic and monastic ideals, they strove to attain right relations in the natural walks and occupations of men. The names "brethren," "brotherhood," had for them only a mystical significance, each brother being quite independent in the conduct of his domestic or private life.

The final separation of the Bohemian Brethren from the Utraquist or old Hussite church occurred in 1467, when they instituted their own clergy. Three pastors were elected by a representative assembly, and received ordination at the hands of a Waldensian priest. To avoid giving offense before the world, and to remove all occasion of stumbling on the part of the weaker members who might consider such ordination insufficient, episcopal ordination was sought the same year at the hands of the Waldensian bishop Stephen, residing in Moravia. Stephen ordained Michael, the pastor of Zamberk, and the latter passed the episcopal unction on one of the newly elected ministers, Matthew of Kunwald.

The ordaining of a separate and independent clergy raised the ire of Rokycana. Up to this moment he had continued friendly to the Brethren, and they had been unceasing in their efforts to win him for their head. But in Rokycana the half-hearted character of Utraquism had found a fitting embodiment. Always hoping to receive papal confirmation in the archiepiscopal office, he thundered at Roman heresy and abuse while his chances remained slim, but was ever ready to compromise with the pope when the latter showed signs of favoring his suit. Moreover, he was in the employ of the established (or state) church of Bohemia, and the constitution of the newly organized *Unitas Fratrum* called for an entire separation between church and state. When, before taking the final step, the Brethren requested him to join them and

become their leader, he replied, "You are too bold; the matter is full of danger, and it would be a tough leap" (*na tvrdo by bylo skociti*). To which they promptly retorted, "Rokycana, thou art a worldling, and with the world thou wilt perish." Ominous words and full of evil portent for Rokycana. The papal see never confirmed him in his office, and the archbishop elect of the Utraquist church died heart-broken at his unrealized ambitions.

Meantime the rupture had become complete, and from this time the ancient *Unitas Fratrum*, outlawed during its entire existence save the brief dozen years just before the Thirty Years' War, was to pass through the fires of persecution. Instigated by Rokycana, the Utraquist king George Podiebrad initiated against the Brethren the long series of repressive mandates whose rigorous execution made of them a truly martyr church. During the subsequent one hundred years no less than thirteen royal mandates were issued against the *Unitas Fratrum*, one of which (that of 1508) found its way into the national constitution. It may be said with truth that the Brethren never had respite from secular and ecclesiastical persecution. Yet in spite of this fact their numbers steadily increased, and their churches so multiplied, that at the beginning of the sixteenth century they had about four hundred congregations; and when, in 1609, the brief day of liberty finally dawned, they bade fair to gain eventually the whole nation on their side. More remarkable still, when the catastrophe of the Thirty Years' War had done its worst, and all seemed forever lost, it was from the smoldering ashes of the *Unitas Fratrum* that a hundred years later, under Zinzendorf's leadership, there arose, phoenix-like, the renewed *Unitas Fratrum*, or the modern Moravian Church. And most remarkable of all, after six generations of unparalleled persecution, when in 1781 the

liberal Emperor Joseph II. issued his Edict of Toleration, it was the lineal descendants of the *Unitas Fratrum* who alone preserved a knowledge of the former things, and showed a longing for a return to the pure faith of their fathers. Utraquism had succumbed completely, while the *Unitas Fratrum* had preserved a seed from which have sprung the modern Reformed and Lutheran churches of Bohemia and Moravia.

This brief historical sketch has led up to the main question, What is the secret of the remarkable vitality and power of this unique church? Apart from the fact that the *Unitas Fratrum* was built upon purely evangelical doctrines, being in reality a Reformed church before the Reformation, the present writer does not hesitate to ascribe its remarkable success in producing an exalted type of Christian character, and developing a vitality that should survive the most appalling disasters, to its thorough organization and its maintenance of the strictest moral discipline of all its adherents. Other churches have had as pure doctrines, nay, have produced profounder theologies and more elaborate confessions, but we venture to say that not one of our modern Protestant churches would have come out of the fiery trials that befel the *Unitas Fratrum* with the same honorable record, yea more, that not one of them would have survived the terrible ordeal. It is with no small interest, therefore, that one turns to the study of the ecclesiastical polity of the *Unitas Fratrum*, or the Church of the Bohemian Brethren.¹

¹ The sources for the study of the *Unitas Fratrum* are: (1) the *Decreta Unitatis Fratrum* (in Bohemian), covering the period from 1488 to 1636, edited by Antonin Gindely, Prague, 1865; (2) The *Ratio Disciplinæ Unitatis Fratrum*, adopted by the Synod of Zeravice, Moravia, in 1611, and first published in Poland, 1632, in the Bohemian language. A Latin edition, issued in Amsterdam, Holland, followed in 1660, and a German one in 1738, bearing the striking title: *Die apostolische Ordnung und Kirchen-Zucht, wie dieselbe bei*

In the first place, the Brethren were careful to distinguish from the start between things essential and those not essential to salvation, and to include nothing in their creed and polity that should in any way obscure or disturb the proper relations of the two. The original founders of the *Unitas Fratrum*,—to use their quaint phraseology,—“finding everything in the Christian religion obscured and perverted, so that people did not stop to consider what things were foremost and what things hindmost therein, and that the people for the most part passed by the essentials, and superstitiously based their hope of salvation mostly on non-essentials and empty ceremonies, began carefully to distinguish between the different elements that make up the Christian religion.” Hence they drew a sharp line between (1) things essential, (2) things helpful, and (3) things external in Christianity. Under the head of essentials they included those things which make up the substance of Christianity, and from which salvation flows; to wit, the grace of God the Father, the merit of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, on the divine side, and faith, love, and hope on the human. By things helpful they understood those things which God himself has ordained as means of securing the things essential; namely, the word of God, the power of the keys, and the sacraments. The word reveals, the keys adjudge, the sacraments seal unto us, the essential things of God. Finally, the things external, or merely incidental, in the Christian religion, the Brethren defined as the ordinances and ceremonies pertaining to things helpful in

denen Gemeinden der Vereinigten Brüder in Böhmen, im Segen und zur allgemeinen seligen Erbauung und Wachsthum in dem Guten, beobachtet und geübet wurden. (3) The eighth chapter of the History of the Bohemian Brethren, by the Polish nobleman and reformer John Lasicki (Johannes a Lasco), published in Amsterdam, 1649, and entitled *Imago Unitatis Fratrum*.

the Christian religion and determining what outward acts are to be performed, and by whom, and where, in order that the essential truths of Christianity might not be obscured, but might rather be made the more potent in their operation.

The first two classes of truths the Brethren later freely acknowledged to hold in common with other Evangelical communions. It is in the last category of things incidental in the Christian religion that they avowedly differed from the churches of the Reformation. But to them they clung tenaciously, and that from principle, having (to quote) "diligently ascertained from the Holy Scriptures, and from the example of the primitive Christian churches, what things are conducive to the enlightenment and edification of the human conscience." But they sensibly add, "We do not cling to these things in such wise as to be adverse to change in case something more edifying were discovered, nor, on the other hand, do we consider it proper to change anything except for the gravest of reasons." It thus appears that the Brethren were conscious of the source of their strength, and guarded it with zealous care.

In putting their principles into practice, the Brethren very properly began with a gradation of their membership into four classes: that of beginners, those growing in grace, the perfect, and the fallen. Among the beginners were included those receiving instruction in the rudiments of the Christian religion, such as children, or adults who had been brought in the Roman Catholic faith, or those whose religious training had been in any wise neglected. These were intrusted to the special care of the pastors. The second class included those who had already attained a practical knowledge of the first principles of the Christian religion, and were under the full care of the pastors. Such were admitted to full membership

in the church, and enjoyed all its privileges. The perfect were those who had attained to so full a knowledge of the things of God, and were so rooted and grounded in Christian faith, love, and hope, that they were capable of enlightening others in them, and could be intrusted with oversight over the weaker members. From this class the lay officers of the local churches were elected. These included the judges, the almoners, the custodians, and the sister elders. Their duties were carefully defined and strictly performed. Space does not permit their detailed enumeration; their names indicate their nature and scope. But to give an idea of the thoroughness and comprehensiveness of the ecclesiastical fabric of the *Unitas Fratrum*, and of the seriousness and purity of spirit which characterized it, we shall indicate some of the duties of the lay elders, or judges of the congregation, as they were also called. These were elected by the entire congregation and were publicly confirmed in their office by the bishop or ordaining elder through the giving of the hand in token of fellowship and of obedience to their superiors. Their number depended upon the size of the local church, two or four being the usual thing. Their first duties concerned themselves and their own households, which they were bound so to manage as to be an example of piety and virtue unto others. Next came their relations to the pastor of the church. Though serving as his assistants, they had oversight over him, visiting him in his home, and ascertaining whether everything there were properly conducted, and reporting any needs or deficiencies to the church. In like manner they had liberty to visit the home of any member of the church, to note the conduct of husband and wife, children and domestics, correcting offenses, and enjoining family worship both morning and evening. They had power to admonish and reprove the worldly, to report the im-

penitent or rebellious to the pastor; in short, they were expected to prevent all possible offenses and scandals in the church. If the head of a household lay sick, it was their duty to visit and comfort him, and in case of emergency to secure provision for the proper support of his widow and orphaned children. To prevent confusion and possible litigation, they were to assist in the settlement of all debts, preferably before the man's demise. In case any orphans or wards were left, the judges had oversight over their interests, that no injustice might be done them. It was also their duty to request the pastor to administer the Lord's Supper to the sick, the judges taking part in the sacrament, and to impart to him the consolations of the dying. At wedding festivities the judges by their presence were expected to set an example of modest and quiet rejoicing, and to prevent all excess and drunkenness. And finally it was their duty to adjust all differences between the brethren, and in case their advice were not accepted, to pray the litigants so to conduct their case in the secular courts that no harm might come to the church through public scandal.

A word about the last division of the laity may not be amiss. These were the fallen, or penitents, and embraced those who were either under discipline or had been expelled from the fellowship of the church. They were by no means neglected or forgotten, but were faithfully labored with, if by any means they might be induced to return to God, and become once more partakers of Christ. All such were not allowed to sit with the rest of the congregation, but had a special place assigned them, not only that they might be made to realize their guilt, and, being brought to penitence, might henceforth be the more zealous in overcoming evil, but also that the just distinction between the good and the bad might be apparent to all.

The order of the clergy among the Brethren was even more

thoroughly organized and disciplined than that of the laity. We shall probably get the best idea of it by following the evolution of a pastor in the *Unitas Fratrum*. While this church had numerous schools of all grades, from the primary school to the college, it had no theological seminaries, but intrusted the training and education of its pastors to the rank and file of its ministry. The different steps in the process corresponded to the four orders of the clergy, or servants of the church; namely, that of acolytes, of deacons, of pastors, and of elders, or bishops. The training of the candidates began early, in fact in childhood. Every settled pastor was required to associate with himself in his household a number of boys with view to training them for the ministry. Extreme care was exercised to choose these from the best Christian families, birth in wedlock being an indispensable consideration. Piety, humility, dignity, a serious, courteous, and obedient spirit were prized above mere brightness of intellect. Hence the early training of these acolytes was rather in piety and good morals than along literary lines. They were expected to excel other youths in piety, in soberness, in obedience to their superiors, and to cultivate the true spirit of disciples and servants. The ringing of the bell for public worship, the opening and the shutting of the church doors, the care of the lights, were some of their menial tasks. The beginnings of theological study consisted in memorizing the larger catechism, the gospels, the shorter epistles, the psalms, and numerous church hymns. At family worship they took part in reading from the Scriptures, occasionally making short exhortations from them, and in offering prayer. In the parish school they assisted in the instruction of the younger children in the catechism. It was their privilege to accompany their pastor on his official tours, not merely in the capacity of servants, but rather that they

might get accustomed to the proper performance of pastoral duties and be witnesses to the good demeanor of their spiritual guide. In the absence of the pastor they were permitted to conduct the minor meetings.

When an acolyte advanced sufficiently in age and literary attainments, he was promoted into the order of deacons. He now gave himself wholly to the study of theology, instructed the school children in the catechism, gave himself to the preparation and delivery of sermons, baptized children, and assisted in the administration of the Lord's Supper when so requested by the pastor. From the order of deacons the regular ministry was chosen. The entrance into any of the orders of the clergy was through the public setting apart for the same. This consisted of appropriate exercises, the chief part of which was the reading of his duties to the candidate, his public promise faithfully to perform the same, his promise of obedience to his superiors, and his presentation to the congregation.

The final process of ordination to the pastoral office was a severe ordeal. The consecration was performed only at the annual, or general, synods, and according to the most rigid rules and forms. The first step was for the pastor to notify his congregation in writing of his intention to present his candidates for ordination at the coming synod. Next the judges, or lay elders, forwarded a written request to the synod, praying that body to take the case of their deacons under consideration, adding their testimony to the moral character and intellectual ability of the candidates, but intrusting the final decision entirely into the hands of the synod. The candidates were also required to furnish a written statement touching the Christian character and general good repute of their parents, including references to their own birth in wedlock. At the

synod they underwent a threefold examination—one before the whole assembly, another before a committee of assistant elders, and a third before a single elder, or bishop, in private.

Before the first examination, the names of the candidates were publicly presented to all the pastors and lay delegates in synod assembled. These then inquired closely into the character and qualifications of each candidate separately, submitting the result of their examination to the elders, or bishops, in writing. If the report was favorable, the candidates were next examined before the assistant elders. Three or four of these would meet about the same number of the deacons, and examine them concerning their knowledge of the Scriptures, their doctrinal views, their personal faith and Christian experience. The candidates were also questioned concerning their motives in seeking ministerial ordination, particularly whether it was their desire to serve Christ and his church, and to seek the salvation of men, or whether they were prompted by any selfish considerations. Finally their age and wisdom were considered, that their youth and inexperience might not become a snare unto them.

If the second examination was sustained, each candidate met one of the bishops privately for the final test. We shall let the Brethren themselves describe the nature of this pithy interview.

“The bishop setting before the candidate the exalted nature, the hardships and dangers, of the pastoral calling, begins to probe the conscience of the aspirant for the office. Are his motives pure, or is his conscience defiled with anything ignoble that would unfit him for so glorious and so heavenly a calling, and cause him but grief and compunction, and possibly bring the wrath and vengeance of God upon him? Has he any bad habits? Is there anything boorish or improper in his manners, and is he willing to correct such fault? Does he desire to serve Christ from pure love, or is he merely seeking a living? Is he willing to share with his hearers not only the gospel, but also his very heart and life?”

These and similar questions were put to the candidate in so earnest and solemn a manner, that, we are told, some, feeling smitten in conscience or becoming distrustful of themselves, begged to be released from assuming the duties of so arduous an office, realizing they had more need of seeking their own salvation with fear and trembling than that they should be intrusted with care for the souls of others. And those that did eventually assume the pastoral office did so only with great anguish of soul, and in humble reliance on God's gracious promises.

The ordination of deacons was in public, and was preceded by a day of fasting and prayer for the candidates and for the needs of the church. The examining committee made their report to the synod, and presented the petition of the church for the ordination of the deacons to the ministry. Then followed the reading of the duties of pastors, which the candidates solemnly acknowledged and accepted, promising to continue in the faithful performance of the same as long as their natural life did last. Upon which the act of ordination was performed through the laying on of the hands of all the bishops present, and prayer, with benediction. The service was concluded by an exhortation to steadfastness and faithfulness on the part of the newly ordained ministers, and the giving of the hand to the bishops in token of obedience, and to the other pastors in token of fellowship, the ordained in turn receiving promises of obedience from the deacons and acolytes, and from the whole congregation. The celebration of the Lord's Supper, chiefly for the strengthening of the new ministers in their calling, fitly crowned the solemn proceedings.

The ceremony of ordination was followed by the pastoral visit. The bishop within whose superintendence the new ministers belonged took them on his official tour for the purpose

of presenting them to the churches, and of promoting mutual acquaintance. In every church visited, the bishop made public announcement of the regular ordination of his protégés. that their standing in the church might become known to all. Short addresses were made by the young ministers to the people, and public prayer was offered for God's blessing on their ministry. In conclusion the bishop conducted the new preachers to the pulpit, and, placing in their hands the symbolical books of the church, exhorted them to the faithful performance of their ministerial duties.

The act of ordination, however, merely introduced the young minister to the pastoral calling. Before being intrusted with a church, he was obliged to serve a term of apprenticeship, from one to four years long, acting as assistant to a regular pastor or to a bishop. This enabled him to get practical knowledge of the work of the ministry, and by experience to become thoroughly fitted for wise and efficient service. It was also in this period that, with the advice and consent of his superiors, the young minister entered upon matrimony. The final settlement of a pastor in his parish was done by the appointment of the bishop, whose duty it was to supply the churches with suitable ministers. This service was conscientiously performed. The churches rarely received a pastor unfit for the place assigned him, and it was expected that the settlement be cheerfully accepted, and be considered lifelong. The ministers in the *Unitas Fratrum* stood upon terms of absolute equality, the rank of a pastor in the regard of the church being determined by priority of ordination. The order of elders, or bishops, did not imply any higher rank or superior sanctity, but represented special service only. Their one distinctive prerogative was their ordaining power. Ordination, as already mentioned, was performed only at the annual syn-

ods. This peculiar practice was intended to guard the purity and competence of the ministry. There were in the later years of the *Unitas Fratrum* six ordaining bishops, two residing in Bohemia, two in Moravia, and two in Poland.

Space does not permit describing the pastoral visits of the bishops, or the ceremonial customs and regulations of the Bohemian Brethren, or their manner of preaching the word of God, which was done at five public services every Sunday. A few words, however, may profitably be devoted to describing the method of admitting to membership in the Unity. One might be tempted to think that, inasmuch as the *Unitas Fratrum* stood without the pale of the law practically during its whole existence, the question of admitting new members would receive but scant attention, as no one not thoroughly in earnest would seek fellowship in an outlawed church. But, on the contrary, the Brethren were extremely careful to bar out all unworthy members, and to admit to fellowship and to assume responsibility only for such of whose probity and Christian knowledge and experience they were certain. This has been the case with all churches whose life was cast upon troublous times. And the *Unitas Fratrum* is the only church since the days of Constantine whose relation to the state was analogous to that of the early Christian church. This fact no doubt accounts largely for the measure of success with which it reproduced the purity and fervor of the early Christian church.

Adults seeking admission from other evangelical bodies, which in later years meant the Lutherans chiefly, were generally received upon promise of obedience to the pastors, and of willingness to be subject to all the rules regulating the life and conduct of members of the Unity. They were exhorted to renew their vows to lead a holy life, and upon receiving the

right hand of fellowship were admitted to all the privileges of the church. Those coming from the Papal Church were first admonished to consider well the step they were about to take. If the applicant professed to have carefully considered the question, he was asked to give his reasons for wishing to leave his church and seeking to join another. In case these were found satisfactory, he was admitted to the class of beginners, or catechumens, where he might become the better acquainted with the life and doctrines of the church, and the church in turn could test his sincerity and piety. Before full admission was granted, the applicant was again questioned concerning his motives in seeking admission to the Unity. Was it because he found the truth of God, good government, and wholesome discipline among the Brethren? Has he confidence in their teachings, their discipline, their pastoral oversight and guidance? If so, is he willing to submit himself to the teachings of God's truth, and to the government of the Unity, to keep the covenant of God, to flee the world and its lusts, and to lead a holy life in accordance with God's will? Does he give the pastor and the lay officers of the local church full right to teach, warn, admonish, reprove, and in case of need to discipline him? And, finally, is he willing and ready to suffer reproach and persecution for the name of Christ? If all was found satisfactory, this private examination before the pastor and the church officers was followed by public reception to membership at the next communion. The candidate was again exhorted to steadfastness in following the truth of God to the end, and the pastor, giving the new member the right hand of fellowship in token of obedience to Christ, announced his reception into the church, and admission to all its privileges. The reception of children was conducted in a similar manner. They were never admitted under twelve years of age, and in

addition to other formalities the rite of laying on of hands was publicly performed over them.

What now are the lessons for our own time to be gained from this brief survey of the organization and practices of the *Unitas Fratrum*? Enough has been said to show the importance attached to order and discipline by the Bohemian Brethren, and the thoroughness and minuteness of the regulations and restrictions that governed both their clergy and laity. There was a studied balancing of the power and duties of both, which, while maintaining the purity and spirituality of the church, greatly facilitated its government and contributed in no small measure to its spread and growth. And the most striking thing is the beautiful spirit of devotion of the Brethren to their institutions. To us their discipline may seem a bit rigid and exacting, but to them it was an easy yoke, which they gladly bore for Christ's own sake. To quote their own testimony :

"We have all been subject to these salutary regulations from the beginning of our organization, and that voluntarily, and without any coercion. Our discipline is maintained cheerfully, there being nothing hard or compulsory or slavish in our reasonable and well-ordered polity, whose animating principle is strict discipline ministering unto our salvation. On the contrary it is to us Christ's easy yoke and light burden which bring peace and refreshment to souls devoted to God."

It is our conviction that, next to the possession of the pure truth of the gospel and simple, childlike faith therein, the one thing which gave the *Unitas Fratrum* its strength and vitality was its splendid discipline and organization. One cannot attribute the remarkable success of this church as a regenerating and missionary force in the world to its theological achievements. The Reformed and Lutheran churches produced profounder theologies, only to become in time mere ballast,

retarding their spiritual progress. And doctrinally the modern Moravian church, the lineal descendant and successor of the ancient *Unitas Fratrum*, harbors both these theologies. On the Continent the Moravian church adheres to the Lutheran symbols, in England and in America to the Reformed. And yet the same spirit pervades the entire Moravian church. This indeed is the distinctive heritage which the *Unitas Fratrum* has bequeathed it. And this likewise explains its wonderful missionary activity. It is a historical fact that there is no region of the earth into which the Protestant missionaries of the nineteenth century penetrated where they did not find the Moravians before them. Hence, in our judgment, the great lesson the *Unitas Fratrum* has to teach our age is the value and need of well-regulated ecclesiastical government—better order and stricter discipline in our churches. Of doctrines and machinery we have plenty: the one thing needful is life nurtured by wholesome discipline in the spirit of the gospel of Christ.